

Thursday, March 1, 2012

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico's Third District expressed his concerns with budget cuts to Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) in a Science, Space, and Technology Committee hearing with Department of Energy Secretary Steven Chu. Below are Luján and Secretary Chu's remarks during the hearing.

Rep. Luján. Dr. Chu, in your prepared testimony you state that with the new START treaty, "the science, technology and engineering capabilities within the nuclear security enterprise will become even more important to sustaining the U.S. nuclear deterrent."

President Obama during his State of the Union this last year said, "Today, the discoveries taking place in our federally-financed labs and universities could lead to new treatments that kill cancer cells but leave healthy ones untouched.' He goes on to say that we shouldn't 'gut these investments in our budget. Don't let other countries win the race for the future."

I'd like to focus on this theme of nurturing the scientific and engineering capabilities of the NNSA laboratories. With the 2013 budget request NNSA's budget will have increased about 10 percent from 2011. Yet over this same two-year time frame the budget to Los Alamos National Laboratory will have decreased by about 10 percent. This is about a \$300 million decrease in just two years and chokes the scientific and engineering capabilities at the lab.

Because of these budget cuts, the lab has requested a voluntary reduction in force incentive program with the goal of eliminating 400 to 800 jobs. This reduces the true source of scientific and engineering capability, the men and women who have served the nation there and who have the experience and training that is difficult and expensive to replace.

And finally, a recent National Academies report warned that distrustful oversight by NNSA, in

which individual transactions are reviewed at every step, is harming the vitality and long-term viability of the science and engineering capability at the NNSA labs.

When you combine all of these – distrustful and harmful oversight with a significant loss of personnel and reduction of funding over multiple years – you get a very damaging set of events that could do permanent harm to the lab, and my district and the northern part of New Mexico.

So Mr. Secretary, I have a lot of respect for you, but I have a lot of concern with what's happening at Los Alamos. As I look at the budget it looks like Los Alamos took a much greater hit than any of the other labs, and quite honestly, almost as much as the other labs combined.

So Mr. Secretary, what I'm looking for is some assurance, some long-term commitment: one to see how we can fix the arbitrary hits that were targeted to Los Alamos, as well as a commitment to Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Secretary Chu. Well certainly Los Alamos National Laboratory is an excellent laboratory, but within our budget constraints going forward we do have to make hard decisions. Certainly Los Alamos is going to be an essential part of the future of the NNSA laboratories. Those hard decisions are going to be made, but we feel that they have not only a very rich past, but an outstanding group of scientists and engineers in that laboratory and will be a vital part of the NNSA mission.

Rep. Luján. I appreciate it Mr. Secretary and I look forward to hopefully meeting with you soon with Senator Bingaman. I know our request has gone into yourself and Mr. D'Agostino, and we look forward to having those conversations about the commitment to Los Alamos.

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